



SUCCESS STORY

Citizens track their electoral processes

With USAID's support, Bolivians monitor their electoral processes, increasing transparency and citizen participation



Anastasio Achacollo, a Mallku from Lagunillas, acted as a citizen observer in Bolivia's recent elections

Working with local civil society organizations and Partners of the Americas, USAID promotes participation and information-sharing in democratic processes in Bolivia.

Lagunillas, an Aymara community located 180 miles from Oruro in the middle of the Altiplano, is home to a rural population whose main activities include growing beans and potatoes and raising llama and sheep. During recent years, migration to other regions due to depressed economic conditions has reduced the community's population from a previous level of 5,000 to 1,300.

The Achacollo family remained in Lagunillas. Anastasio, the head of the household, is a well respected *Mallku* or local leader. He and his wife, Josefina, have raised a family of nine children.

Anastasio was recently chosen by his community to act as an observer in the December 2005 elections. He is one of 2,700 Bolivian citizens who were trained to observe and monitor the election process by the Citizen Observers Project, carried out by the USAID-supported civil society network, *Citizens for Participation and Justice*, supported by a grant to the U.S. Private Voluntary Organization *Partners of the Americas*.

Anastasio, together with other women and men from urban and rural areas, participated to ensure the transparency and validity of the election process in 1,400 voting sites throughout the country.

Citizens were trained to observe and monitor the process on election day, from opening to closing of polling stations, casting of ballots, and reporting procedures. At the end of the day, the observers submitted their reports on the process to the network's headquarters where they were reviewed and consolidated. The project garnered praise from national and international organizations, including the Organization of American States (OAS). The OAS, which coordinated a simultaneous monitoring process by international observers, called the Citizen Observers Project a "best practice" that could be used as a model for other countries.

Conscientious citizens like Anastasio Achacollo worked hard on election day to ensure fair, transparent elections and broader participation by the Bolivian population in the democratic process. USAID seeks to help Bolivians in their efforts to strengthen civil society and their organizations. Future plans include assisting the civil society network to participate in monitoring the upcoming Constituent Assembly and national vote on regional autonomy. Anastasio Achacollo, the *Mallku* of Lagunillas, may have yet another opportunity to demonstrate the importance of citizen participation in consolidating Bolivia's democracy, with assistance from USAID.